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**NORTH CAROLINA AND TEXAS RECOGNIZED AS NATIONAL MODELS
FOR BOOSTING STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT**

**Research Study Confirms Value of Consistent Business Leadership,
Standards and Accountability**

(WASHINGTON, D.C.) A new study that both belies conventional wisdom about problems in K-12 education and illuminates some approaches for solving them points to the extraordinarily successful policies of two states - North Carolina and Texas - as models for reform throughout the nation.

Commissioned by The National Education Goals Panel (NEGP) and written by David Grissmer and Ann Flanagan, *Exploring Rapid Achievement Gains in North Carolina and Texas* investigates the factors that accounted for the significant gains both states posted on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). Between 1990 and 1997 North Carolina and Texas posted the largest average gains in the country on seven key NAEP assessments. The NAEP results are mirrored in state assessments administered during the same period, and there is evidence of the scores of disadvantaged students improving more rapidly than those of advantaged students.

The study found that several factors commonly associated with student achievement - real per pupil spending, teacher/pupil ratios, teachers with advanced degrees and experience levels of teachers - are not adequate for explaining the test score gains. Both states rank at or below national averages on these characteristics and none of them changed during the period under study in ways that could explain the gains.

What the study *did* find was a series of factors - common to both North Carolina and Texas - that led to major changes in the structure of the state's education systems, and to strong accountability measures for students, teachers and principals alike.

"In North Carolina we know what it takes to make our schools work and give our children the education they deserve," said North Carolina Governor Jim Hunt. "It takes higher standards, safer schools and keeping good teachers in our schools. And it takes everyone working together to make our schools succeed."

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“This study shows Texas is on the right track to meet education goals,” said Texas Governor George W. Bush. “We raised the academic bar in Texas, and student performance – across the board, for every subject, every ethnic group, every grade level tested – is improving. We are making great progress toward our goal of educational excellence for every child in Texas.”

Explaining the Gains

Close examination of the education policies and practices that emerged during the period of improvement found a series of factors common to both North Carolina and Texas – leadership from the business community, political leadership and continuity of the reform agenda.

Business Leadership

In both states, business leaders were extraordinarily active in forming strategic plans for improvement, forging partnerships with education interests and supporting passage of necessary legislation.

In both states, business funded organizations created coalitions between the business, education and policymaking communities. In North Carolina, this began in 1984 with the Commission on Education for Economic Growth and later the North Carolina Public School Forum. In Texas in the early 1980s it began with the Perot Commission and continued with the Texas Business-Education Coalition. In Texas, business people also formed Texans for Education, an independent organization to represent the business perspective in education reform.

Developing these systems in both states was a long and arduous process, and the business community in both states was the single most stable, persistent and long-term influence for the reform agenda implemented.

Political Leadership

While political leadership in both states was essential to the reform process, neither state had continuity in party affiliations of key office holders – and both states experienced significant turmoil around education issues during this period. Passage of legislation in both states was accomplished not through straight party-line votes, but through coalitions from both parties.

Since the early 1990s, both states have benefited from the election of Governors with education leading their list of policy priorities. Governor Hunt has sponsored many new

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initiatives to further the reform agenda, including an emphasis on early childhood education through the Smart Start program and major legislation to improve the quality of instruction and to align teacher education in North Carolina with the state standards. Governor Bush has emphasized programs for mastery of reading skills in the early grades and a renewed focus on decentralization.

Consistent Reform Agendas

Educational improvement efforts are all too often examples of reform *du jour*. In North Carolina and Texas this is not the case. Despite changes of Governors and among legislators, the current incumbents have chosen to continue the reform agenda, and to find ways to build on and improve it. Acceptance of the new system is growing among educators as they realize they can successfully meet its challenges.

The Policies

The initiatives that led to new policies began in both states in the late 1980s and continued through the 1990s. The main elements include:

- **Adopting Statewide Standards by Grade for Clear Teaching Objectives.** Academic standards were adopted in both states. The standards were set for each grade and several subjects.
- **Holding All Students to the Same Standards.** With the exception of those with significant learning disabilities, who have their own Individual Education Plan, disadvantaged students are held to the same standards as advantaged students.
- **Linking Statewide Assessments to Academic Standards.** In both states, new statewide assessments were developed and aligned to the standards at each grade. Statewide testing to these standards began in Texas in 1993-94, and in North Carolina in 1992-93.
- **Creating Accountability Systems with Benefits and Consequences for Results.** Both states rate schools based their performance on state tests. Both reward schools financially for improved performance, and have the power to disenfranchise school districts and remove principles based on sustained levels of poor performance. Both show awareness of social and economic factors that could provide an unfair advantage to certain schools. Both keep close scrutiny of the students not taking tests.

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- **Increasing Local Control and Flexibility for Administrators and Teachers.**
Strategic plans developed in both states acknowledged that teachers and administrators could not be held accountable unless they were given authority and flexibility to determine how to meet the standards.
- **Providing Test Scores and Feedback Via Computer for Continuous Improvement.** Both states have a well-designed computerized system of storing test information and providing access in various ways for teachers, principals and school districts. Both states report test results in relation to key learning objectives. Teachers have access to individual tests of students entering their classes each year.
- **Shifting Resources to Schools with More Disadvantaged Students.** Both schools gradually shifted resources to schools with more disadvantaged students. This shift was partially the result of judicial decisions requiring the state to fund school districts more equitably.

About the Panel

The National Education Goals Panel is a unique bipartisan and intergovernmental body of federal and state officials created in July 1990 to assess and report on state and national progress toward achieving the National Education Goals. On December 10, 1998, the Panel will release the 1998-99 Annual Goals Report, which provides the latest information – both nationally and state-by-state – on progress in a wide variety of areas related to educational improvement. These “indicators” of the nation’s progress range from childhood immunizations to achievement in core academic subjects to drug and alcohol abuse in schools to parental involvement and more.

For copies of *Exploring Rapid Achievement Gains in North Carolina and Texas*, visit the Goals Panel website at www.negp.gov. For additional information, please contact Chris Beakey at (202) 667-0901, or John Barth at (202) 724-0015.

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